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ABSTRACT

The study examines origins of the usage patterns of "be" forms (conjugated and invariant forms of the copula) in Black English as they developed over a period of about 30 years. The corpus studied consists of selected interviews from a collection of recordings about Hoodoo, conjuration, witchcraft, and rootwork made by a white priest with almost exclusively black informants in several southern and northern states in the 1930s and 1940s and again in 1970. An introductory chapter gives background to the topic and discusses terminology used. The second chapter describes the corpus and study methodology. Chapter three begins with several hypotheses concerning the invariant "be" and examines its usage patterns in the corpus under study. Conjugated, contracted, and zero-forms are considered in chapter four. Appended materials include a list of informants, notes on the tagging system, and a list of invariant "be"-forms. Contains 419 references. (MSE)

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